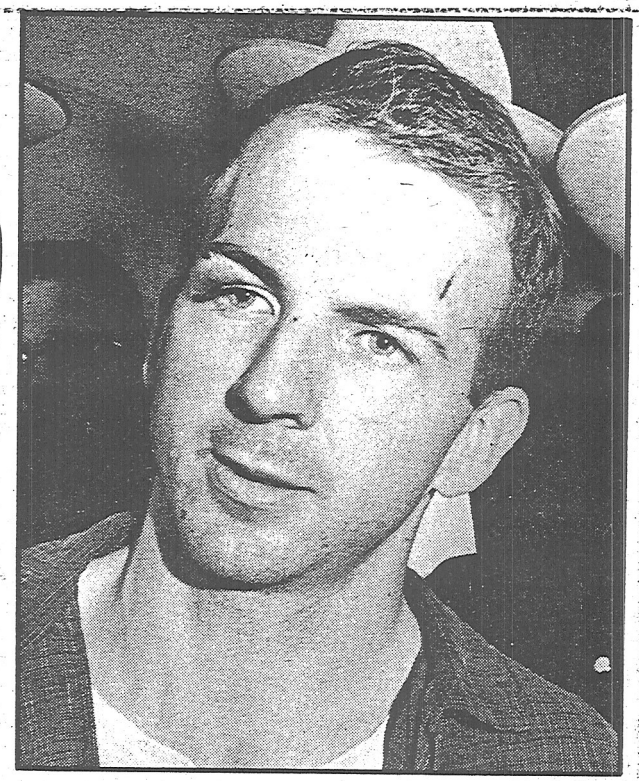
# CIA GOOF ON OSWALD MAY HAVE COST JFK HIS LIFE



**LEE HARVEY OSWALD** visited Cuban and Soviet missions in Mexico seven weeks before JFK's assassination. But when this was reported to CIA headquarters in Washington, his name and description were inaccurate.

**A routine clerical error by a woman working for the CIA may have cost President John F. Kennedy his life.**

By JACK KELLEY
MIDNIGHT Book Editor

That bizarre possibility is suggested by a veteran intelligence agent who was assigned to the CIA's Mexico City station in the fall of 1963 when Lee Harvey Oswald made his mysterious contacts with the Cuban and Soviet missions there, just seven weeks before Kennedy was gunned down in Dallas.

After Oswald arrived in Mexico City, the wife of a CIA officer there cabled Washington to ask for information about him.

But a potentially fatal blunder was made when — because of a simple misunderstanding — she sent Washington the wrong name and physical description.

The perplexing mixup is revealed for the first time by former CIA man David Atlee Phillips in his book, "The Night Watch — 25 Years of Peculiar Service," just published by Atheneum.

Phillips says that when Oswald showed up in Mexico City none of the CIA personnel there knew who he was. But after they learned that Oswald was seeking permission to return to Russia via Cuba, "Craig," the case officer in charge of Soviet operations, decided they had better find out more about him.

"The circumstances were such that a cable to headquarters asking for a file check on Oswald was in order," he says. But Craig was busy with other things and put off sending the cable. Finally, Craig's wife, who was his part-time assistant, "typed out the cable herself, dropping it on her husband's desk for review before it went to (station chief) Win Scott for release.

"Who," the cable asked Washington, "is Lee Henry Oswald?"

Not only was the middle name wrong, but so was the description. Writes Phillips: "Craig's wife described Lee 'Henry' Oswald as 'approximately 35

years old, with an athletic build, about six feet tall, with a receding hairline.' "

That was not a description of Oswald, but of a totally different "mystery man" who had also visited the Soviet mission in Mexico City.

Why the wrong middle name? "Because," Phillips explains, "Craig's wife did not read about Oswald but heard about him. It was her phonetic observation."

Why the wrong description? "She had put together two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which appeared compatible but which did not, in fact, fit together. She had put one (Oswald, seeking a visa from the Soviets) and one (an unknown visitor to the Russian embassy) together and come up with an incorrect two: the assumption that the two men were the same."

Sometime before Kennedy's assassination the CIA realized a mistake had been made.

Phillips does not say how long it took to straighten out the confusion. Nor does he speculate about what might have happened had the mixup not occurred.

The implication is clear for those who want to seize on it.

But for an all-too-human error, things might have been different.